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Elections to fill vacancies in subsidiary organs and other elections: election of eighteen members of the Human Rights Council

Letter dated 25 March 2009 from the Permanent Representative of Belgium to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly

I have the honour to inform you that the Government of Belgium has submitted its candidature to the Human Rights Council for the period from 2009 to 2012, in advance of the elections to be held in May 2009.

Please find attached a document containing the voluntary human rights pledges and commitments of Belgium, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 60/251 (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have this letter and its annex circulated as a document of the General Assembly.

(*Signed*) Jan **Grauls**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative of Belgium to the United Nations

09-28884 (E) 090409 090409

Please recycle

Annex to the letter dated 25 March 2009 from the Permanent Representative of Belgium to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly

Introduction

1. Belgium maintains worldwide commitments to promote and protect human rights and is convinced that civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated.

2. The promotion of human rights is a priority in the domestic and foreign policy of Belgium. Human rights are an integral part of the actions we take on the international stage, based on the conviction that full respect for all human rights makes them mutually reinforcing and that this respect is essential for the respect of the human dignity of each individual.

3. As a founder Member of the United Nations, Belgium has promoted and protected human rights for a very long time. Belgium is always ready to collaborate with all other States to improve the situation of human rights.

4. Those many years of commitment are notably reflected in membership of the former Commission on Human Rights (1947-1950, 1952-1954, 1958-1960, 1986-1991, 2001-2003) and the Commission on the Status of Women (1956-1958, 1970-1980, 1995-2011). Belgium currently serves as chairperson of the Commission on the Status of Women.

5. The policy of Belgium clearly establishes the link between peace and security, development and human rights, the three pillars of the United Nations. Belgium is convinced that the promotion and protection of human rights are essential to the achievement of peace, security and development.

6. To contribute actively to international efforts to ensure greater respect for human rights, and to raise the profile of our activities in the area of human rights, Belgium has submitted its candidature to the United Nations Human Rights Council for the period from 2009 to 2012. Belgium has played an active role in the work of the Council since its establishment. With this candidature, Belgium hopes to strengthen further its commitment and to show its determination to cooperate with an energetic and effective Human Rights Council.

7. Moreover, Belgium's envisaged participation in the Council's work will be of greater significance in the second half of 2010 when Belgium assumes the presidency of the European Union.

8. As a member of the Human Rights Council, Belgium pledges to continue to play an important role in the effective promotion and protection of human rights.

1. To participate actively in all the activities of the Human Rights Council

9. Since the Human Rights Council is essential to the prevention of human rights abuses and to human rights promotion, Belgium will be actively involved in any activities to enhance its functioning. Belgium will ensure that the Council, which also plays a key role in the fight against human rights violations, will nurture the discussion of specific situations and thematic issues as required.

10. Convinced that maintaining and strengthening the system of special procedures is fundamental to the promotion and protection of human rights, Belgium will strive to guarantee the independence of those special procedures.

11. Belgium will continue to collaborate fully with the special procedures in accordance with its commitment to receive them within its territory whenever they so request. In recent years, Belgium has been visited by the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent (2006) and the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (2000).

12. As in the past, Belgium pledges to respond quickly to communications from special rapporteurs to ensure active follow-up to the recommendations they make.

13. Belgium's report for its universal periodic review in 2011 will, in accordance with its normal policy, be prepared on the basis of a transparent and inclusive approach involving civil society including non-governmental organizations.

14. Furthermore, Belgium will continue to play an active role to ensure that the universal periodic review becomes an effective and robust instrument of the Human Rights Council that will lead to tangible improvements in the situation of human rights on the ground. In that regard, Belgium will make every effort necessary to ensure enhanced, constructive and transparent dialogue among States.

15. In accordance with its own practice, Belgium will continue to pay special attention to civil society and will ensure that it remains actively associated with the work of the Human Rights Council.

2. To support and strengthen the other bodies of the United Nations human rights system

16. Alongside the Human Rights Council, the work of the Third Committee of the General Assembly of the United Nations should continue to make a dynamic contribution to the promotion, protection and defence of human rights.

17. Therefore, Belgium will continue to support this universal body so it can stimulate and advance the treatment of thematic and geographic questions and enhance the implementation of human rights standards.

18. Belgium pledges, furthermore, to continue to encourage the universal ratification and effective implementation of the main human rights treaties.

19. Belgium has supported the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights since its establishment and will resolutely pursue that course. The Office's independence and impartiality, which are essential to the role it plays in the promotion and protection of human rights, must be preserved.

20. Belgium is one of the main donors of the Office of the High Commissioner. Two thirds of its contributions are not earmarked and the rest is specifically set aside to support the system of special procedures, the Fund for Victims of Torture and the Trust Fund on Contemporary Forms of Slavery. The contribution of Belgium is spread over a multi-year commitment.

21. Belgium attaches great importance to the effective functioning of the treaty bodies of the United Nations human rights system.

22. Belgium will continue to cooperate fully with the different committees; it will submit its periodic reports in a timely fashion, engage in an interactive dialogue with members of the committees during its oral presentations and actively follow up on their recommendations.

23. Belgium transmitted its fifth periodic report on the implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in 2008 and has recently submitted its third periodic report on the Convention on the Rights of the Child to the treaty body concerned.

24. The second report on the implementation of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and the fifth and sixth combined report of Belgium on the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, have recently been examined by the relevant committees.

25. In this context, Belgium also attaches great importance to open and constructive dialogue with civil society.

3. Enhanced action in the sphere of human rights

26. Renewed attention will be paid to all victims of human rights violations, especially children, women, human rights defenders and the victims of all forms of discrimination, torture, sexual violence and human trafficking.

27. The fight against all forms of racism and discrimination remains one of the major priorities of Belgian policy. All potential victims of racism, discrimination, xenophobia and intolerance must receive the same attention and the same protection.

28. Convinced that a society's diversity can become a key to its success, Belgium advocates an open and tolerant society, in which all people must be able to find a place.

29. Against the background of its active participation at the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance (Durban, South Africa, 2001), and as a member of the Bureau of the Preparatory Committee, Belgium is closely involved in the preparatory process for the Durban Review Conference to be held in April 2009.

30. At the sixty-third session of the General Assembly, Belgium sponsored jointly with Slovenia, the biennial resolution on the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. Belgium underlines with its sponsorship the importance it attaches to this Convention and to its implementation.

31. It is crucial for counter-terrorism efforts to pay due regard to human rights and Belgium is committed to guaranteeing the fundamental rights of the individual under its own domestic counter-terrorism legislation. Belgium will continue to work to ensure that respect for human rights is built into international counter-terrorism efforts.

32. The dynamic stance taken by Belgium in its foreign policy and development cooperation policy to encourage the consolidation of the rule of law and the fight against impunity will be pursued. Special attention will be given to strengthening its support for initiatives and plans that contribute to promoting human rights in this

particular area. Belgium's involvement in the Third Committee as a sponsor of the resolution on the elimination of violence against women, which concentrated this year on the fight against impunity, is a priority for the country. The protection of women victims of sexual violence calls for even greater vigilance.

33. Convinced of the importance of the value added of solid regional systems, especially to strengthen the universality of human rights, Belgium will continue to advocate for regional systems for the promotion and protection of human rights, both in the Third Committee of the General Assembly and in the Human Rights Council. On the initiative of Belgium, a seminar on the theme was held in Geneva on 24 and 25 November 2008.

4. To revitalize the promotion and protection of human rights at the national level

34. Belgium pledges to respect the obligations arising from the ratification of various human rights treaties and acknowledges that there is still room for improvement in that regard at the national level.

35. Belgium has ratified the main human rights treaties[1] and is currently doing everything it can to ratify without delay the legal instruments adopted recently, namely the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Optional Protocol thereto.

36. Belgium has participated actively in the preparation of the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and will accede to it as soon as it is adopted by the General Assembly.

37. The achievement of the eight Millennium Development Goals is the central element of Belgium's development cooperation activities. Belgium has pledged to comply by 2010 with the United Nations requirement that industrialized countries should allocate 0.7 per cent of their gross domestic product to official development assistance. Equality between men and women, the fight against sexual violence, the rights of the child, the situation of children in armed conflict and climate change are the main priorities for Belgium development cooperation. Belgium development cooperation is founded on a results-based approach.

38. To turn its pledges into concrete benefits for human rights protection, Belgium has adopted various national action plans that provide a reference framework for the definition of its policies. Some examples are listed below:

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[1] International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1983), the First Optional Protocol thereto (1994), the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Aiming at the Abolition of the Death Penalty (1998), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1983), International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1975), Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1985), Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (2004), Convention on the Rights of the Child (1991), Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (2002), Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (2006), and the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1999).

(a) The federal poverty-reduction plan was adopted in July 2008. Although Belgium is privileged in terms of economic and social development, this plan acknowledges that not all citizens of our country share that prosperity equally. This action plan aims to offer everybody the possibility of living a decent life, as guaranteed in article 23 of the Belgium Constitution.

(b) The national plan of action against domestic violence (2008-2011). The plan covers a form of violence that not only affects the direct victim but also other family members, especially children. Under this plan, each federal minister undertakes, within the framework of his or her policies, to define a strategic goal that contributes to the promotion of equality between men and women.

(c) Pursuant to Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), the national plan of action concerning women, peace and security was developed towards the end of 2008.

(d) The national plan of action against human trafficking, covering the period from 2008-2011, was adopted in 2008.

(e) The national plan of action against racism, anti-Semitism and xenophobia was adopted in 2004, as part of the efforts to implement the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action.

39. Belgium has established various institutions that have a broad mandate for the promotion, respect and defence of human rights, including the centre for equal opportunities and the fight against racism, the institute for the equality of women and men and the new national commission for the rights of the child, established in 2007.

40. Belgium will continue to hold and give priority to open and critical dialogue with regard to its human rights policy with the special rapporteurs and various representatives of civil society, including representatives of non-governmental organizations.